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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the role of alternative schools in the field of special education, with particular attention given to the education of behaviorally disordered or seriously emotionally disturbed children. The paper begins with information on the history of alternative schools for this population and continues with a discussion of identification, referral, and placement. Issues of how to effect social and behavioral development in the alternative school environment are noted, including the use of student progress systems. Aversive and deprivation-based intervention approaches are considered, and guidelines are offered for their use. The component of alternative programming designed to facilitate children's return to the mainstream is discussed, as are obstacles to the evaluation of alternative programs. (CL)

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CHAPTER 6

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PROGRAMMING FOR BEHAVIOR DISORDERED CHILDREN

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The history of alternative schools has been one of cycles and varied success. Typically, cries for new schools, innovative programs, different administrative organizations, or new forms of service delivery have been based on differing perceptions of how to resolve curriculum and instructional problems evidenced by children who apparently have diverse learning and developmental characteristics. Also, alternative schools are thought to be means through which national goals in education can be accomplished. These goals are frequently established for those students who do not comfortably fit the ordinary provisions of the general education system. Proposals are made to have students certified as divergent and then served through special means and systems. For example, early national efforts to educate immigrant children are correlated with special schools and supposedly specialized instruction and curricula (Hoffman, 1974). The rapid expansion of alternative school programs during the 1960's and 1970's frequently was intended to provide an appropriate education to non-achieving, dropout prone, and, oftentimes, behaviorally disaffected youth (Kozol, 1972). Education for minority students, urban students, poor or disenfranchised students, and other groups has been implemented so that alternatives are a standard offering or design in many school systems (National Alternative Schools Program, 1975). Currently, neo-traditional alternative programs are being established that provide a relatively conservative, frequently Christian-oriented educational environment (Newsweek, January 2, 1984). Finally, special education services have undergone a decade of unparalleled expansion

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to meet legal and social mandates of providing a free and appropriate public education to diverse groups of handicapped children and youth. "Appropriate" has been often interpreted to mean "alternative."

While alternative schools and programs have arisen in response to needs that are thought to be best served through education, the success or longevity of these programs is much more related to the perceptions held by the "powers-that-be" in a given community than the actual efficacy of the program. The life expectancy of alternative school programs has as much to do with how welcome that program is in a community as it does with service provided, outcomes attained, or continued need for the program. In special education, an alternative school's existence may be related to regulatory mandates, too.

Thus, alternative schools have come and gone, have been started in response to a perceived national or community need, have operated on the hope that making alternatives available to different groups of children and youth would be educationally positive and productive, and have succeeded or failed more in relation to political, economic, and social expectations and variables than educational variables. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the role of alternative schools in the field of special education, with special attention given to the education of behaviorally disordered or seriously emotionally disturbed children. This discussion will attempt to further the efforts of the National Needs Analysis/Leadership Training Project in Behavior Disorders, University of Missouri-Columbia, by illustrating the role of alternative schools as an alternative to the practice of disciplinary exclusion. To accomplish this purpose, an examination of multiple issues involved with alternative schools is required. First, some clarifying points are needed.

Administration and Educational Programs

Confusion occurs when an administrative organization is thought to be synonymous with an educational program. A "school" cannot be equated with an "instructional program." In this chapter, "alternative school" means an administrative organization designed to accomplish the objectives of managing special education programs; "alternative school environments" or "programming" is intended to refer to the instructional and curriculum practices typically used with students in a school.

Lest this distinction seem frivolous, I point to the differences described in two articles: Deno's (1970), in which she describes the special education "cascade of services" administrative model; and McCauley's (1977), in which he describes the essential ingredients necessary to an exemplary instructional program for behavior disordered students.

Deno's (1970) "cascade model" established guidelines for determining the percentage of special education service to be given students placed in any one of six administrative service levels and a coherent approach to deciding the extent of services and resources to be allocated at any given level. Much of the model presented by Deno stimulates discussion of administrative variables in the provision of special education services: number of personnel and type of educational training needed to match with a known or suspected number of children needing service; school facilities needed; communication and role relationships between general and special education; job responsibilities and descriptions; policies and procedures related to due process issues; referral and placement systems; meeting of federal and state regulatory mandates; budget; and so on.

McCauley (1977), in turn, seeks to clarify the elements around which an instructional program is organized and operated, independent of administrative

level or organizational arrangement. He asserts that, "... an educational program (is) a planned, cohesive, systematic effort to serve the developmental needs of specific populations of children . . . " (p. 7) through the explication and manipulation of key programming variables such as the following:

1. An ideational or philosophical context
2. Program goals
3. Population definition
4. Program entry procedures
5. Intervention methods, curriculum, and materials
6. Program exit procedures
7. Program evaluation design and procedures
8. Professional and community acceptance.

Therefore, an analysis of alternative schools and the programming conducted within the boundaries of those schools would not lead us along the same path. Each subject could have profoundly different dimensions for discussion. This writer will occasionally move back and forth between the two in an effort to focus on the multiplicity of issues in providing an appropriate education to behavior disordered children through alternative channels.

Alternative Schools for Behavior Disordered Children

Much has been written on the roles assumed by alternative schools (Gross & Gross, 1969; Reimer, 1971; Silberman, 1970). Rather than rehash this material, a few significant issues related to the education of behavior disordered children and youth can be derived from these writings.

As Nelson (1977) has so clearly articulated, alternative schools have often been established so as to increase the flexibility and relevance of education for difficult-to-educate students who exhibit behaviors discrepant from the community or school system's standard expectations. He also notes,

accurately, and unfortunately so, that students may be in special class alternatives as much for the convenience of a school system that would not modify its practices to fit student needs as for the students' well-being.

It does seem true that many alternative schools for the behaviorally disordered are opened as much in response to a community and educational system perceiving threat from their youngsters as from any coherent plan to provide comprehensive and intensive services to youngsters with a given set of needs. While the writers cited above (e.g., Gross & Gross, 1969) actively sought structural changes in the general, mainstream educational system so as to increase relevance and heterogeneity in the curriculum-instructional process, special education suffers from the problem of having educational options created that are often:

1. For the purpose of systematically removing groups of youngsters from participation in the normal available educational environments.
2. Self-contained in administrative design, located at Levels 4, 5, and 6 of the "cascade" service delivery model, and thus are on a parallel, but nonetheless separate educational path to general education.
3. Designed to meet regulatory requirements pertaining to identification, referral, and placement, including parental participation in a due process-based decision making system, but give little to no choice to the individual in selecting either the educational placement (school or program) or the educational treatment or intervention process to be employed.
4. Certifying and labeling a youngster as deviant, and actively participating in a process that describes the child as the source of problems, segregates him/her from peers, diminishes her/his self-esteem, and evaluates his/her progress according to singular, middle-class, and too often, inadequately derived norms for achievement, socialization, and behavior.
5. Immersing students in an environment using behavior intervention strategies designed to seriously alter student lives with little or no evaluation of the impact of these strategies on an individual or group.

These issues must be faced squarely and openly by alternative schools serving a behavior disordered population. The general history of alternative schools

has been to provide educational options that meet the needs of diverse groups of children, including those who are actually or possibly handicapped. The history of alternative schools in special education has been less optimistic in that these options have been closely associated with the removal of children from the broad general education program (and its options) to a narrower educational focus. This has both positive and detrimental consequences for children's learning and development.

Identification, Referral, and Placement

Grosenick and Huntze (1983) note that the number of behaviorally disordered children served in public school programs has grown from approximately 1,500 students in 1964 to about 349,000 students in 1981, a 99% growth rate. Yet, as these authors have noted in previous works of the National Needs Analysis Project, the number of children identified as seriously emotionally disturbed or behaviorally disordered may be conservative (Grosenick & Huntze, 1980). Most research on incidence rates establish a 2-3% rate; most prevalence statistics run far below that rate (Long, 1983). It could be argued that such statistics indicate care and precision in the identification, assessment, and subsequent referral to an appropriate level of educational placement. Such care and precision would reduce the effects of erroneous or harsh labeling, provide valid and reliable assessment of the child in relationship to his/her environment, and match a child's characteristics with intervention plans suited to the child in the least restrictive educational environment.

The alternative school program is often in a position to take such care and precision. It is "common knowledge" that referrals of supposed behavior disordered children often begin as a cry for help, usually phrased as "You've got to get this kid out of here - our school can no longer tolerate him/her." A valuable service to be provided to the general education system by a special

education system, particularly an alternative school, is a set of well defined identification, referral, assessment, and placement-into-program procedures. Many horror stories are told about how children deemed behaviorally disordered have been moved suddenly and with little or no informed consent from parents or surrogates or without explicating any decision-making process related to a placement change. Furthermore, grim concerns have been raised by Grosenick, et al. (1981) that many handicapped students may be excluded from school systems for reasons related to their handicap.

One generic process is outlined in Figure 1. This process is adapted from McCauley and Erikson (1979), and illustrates a means of determining whether or not a child is appropriate for an alternative school program. The process outlines a series of tasks related to a phase of an identification, referral, assessment, and placement system, and notes who holds responsibilities for carrying out these tasks. It suggests the primary decisions to be made during this process, the timeline to be followed, and the data and data management necessary to make these decisions.

Essentially, a decision-making framework is established that guarantees a parent's (and child's) civil rights (due process rights) and attempts to use objective and performance-level behavior as a basis for what are, in the final analysis, value decisions on how to best educate a child.

An identification, referral, assessment, and placement process must beware of problems identified by Long (1983), particularly when that process is associated with the local or regional self-contained alternative school. Alternative schools in special education tend to advertise themselves as providers of highly specialized, intensively planned and implemented services. Long's (1983) research identified a positive correlation between the presence of high levels of specialized services and an increased use of "severe" in the emotional disturbance label assigned to a student. She also noted that

FIGURE 1
Generic Processes for Determining Need for
Alternative School for Individual Child

Process	Task	Data	Responsibility	Decisions	Time
<u>IDENTIFICATION</u>	Determine which student(s) need an alternative school. Determine which student(s) are not accelerating achievement or pro-social behaviors in general education structure.	Description of current school program, instructional and intervention strategies used, and student performance. Performance discrepancies between student and program expectations.	General education system: teachers, administrators, support roles.	Can school meet child's needs? Referred to an alternative school? Modifications to be made in general system to meet child's needs?	Undetermined
<u>REFERRAL</u>	Compile data, observations, and evaluations to submit to alternative school and team analysis.	Analysis indicates a need for assessment as to child's needs and appropriate educational program required. Analysis derived from observational and performance discrepancies.	General education system personnel in team with alternative school personnel. Parents and student. Non-educational agency personnel.	Carryout a referral to alternative school? Development assessment plan for child?	1-2 Weeks
<u>ASSESSMENT</u>	Appraise child responses and interactions when presented learning tasks, educational environments, and socialization expectations. Develop objective, precise, behavioral description of child's performance in relation to current environment.	Assessment of current level and learning rate of student performance in relation to environmental expectations. Experimental evaluation of instructional strategies, interventions, and services that alter performance level and rate.	Alternative school personnel in cooperation with general education's personnel. Parents, non-educational agency personnel, student.	Priority of student needs? Special education service needs? Type of learning environment? Significant discrepancies that indicate problem?	30 school days (6 weeks)
<u>PROGRAM SPECIFICATIONS</u>	Plan short-and-long range goals for child. Predict instructional curriculum strategies that will positively affect child's performance. Specify learning environment that will foster child's performance (placement).	Analysis of assessment data to determine priority of needs. Relate performance data to behavioral, measurable objectives. Analyze learning rate changes from manipulation of instructional/intervention/service strategies. Relate data to recommendations for learning environment.	Alternative school personnel in cooperation with general education personnel. Parents, student. Non-educational agency personnel. (Child Study Team).	Program placement in relationship to individual's goals? Resources needed to implement program? Value considerations to be made by people involved?	1 Week

children residing in higher SES districts tended to receive more specialized services and be removed greater distances from general educational offerings than children from poorer school districts or districts with higher proportions of minority group students. As Long (1983) states, "It appears that the presence of sophisticated services in a school district, while not fostering overdetection per se, may contribute to the labeling of children as more severely disturbed, once they have been detected. Specialized, expensive services, once developed, may require the generation of sufficient numbers of children who are considered disturbed enough to use them" (p. 52). These problems cannot be treated as a "caveat emptor" problem; the alternative school program staff need to take an active part in resolving these problems and preventing the inappropriate labeling and placement of children through their referral processes.

Curriculum and Instruction

Given placement of youngsters in an alternative school, the difficult business of providing them an effective educational environment comes to the fore. The implementation of a given curriculum and instructional program begins. Philosophically, each alternative school program may specify the school's anticipated outcomes and methods for attaining those goals in theoretically or conceptually consistent terms. However, few alternative school programs operate in theoretically pure terms. They make numerous a priori decisions about the educational environment to be provided and the expected impact on student performance, and must shape their programs around legal and regulatory requirements.

Yet, there are elements that have been determined as critical to success. These elements apply in general to curriculum and instructional processes employed in a school program, and guide the a priori decisions to be made.

For example, Sarri (1982) suggests that alternative school programs for behavior disordered children are most likely to be successful when they incorporate the following elements:

1. Goal-oriented learning and work in the classroom.
2. Individualized instruction with curricula that are tailored to individual interests and needs.
3. Clear rewards for individual improvement in academic competency.
4. Caring and competent teachers who develop warm and meaningful interpersonal relationships with students.
5. Strong supportive leadership by the school administration that establishes the climate for implementation and is correlated with normative behavior by youth.
6. A small student population of 100 or fewer.
7. Low student-adult ratios . . .
8. Flexibility, innovation, and a positive attitude toward change by the administration and staff that facilitates program effectiveness and increases student satisfaction (p. 5).

To focus on one critical element, the individualization of instruction is a powerful variable affecting behaviorally disordered children in an alternative school environment. For multiple reasons, many children placed in an alternative special education school require modified or specially prepared curriculum that will foster accurate responses, increase response rates, generate higher rates of positive reinforcement for task attention, completion, and accuracy, give precise feedback on learning performance on a daily and longer term basis, reinforce positive interactions with peers and adults in learning environments, provide a sequenced set of skills transferable to other curricula tasks, and aid in cognitive rules or cues to be used in problem-solving or more open-ended curricula tasks.

As Filipczak (1977) has pointed out, the selection and utilization of learning materials and equipment are key components to the effectiveness

of alternative learning environments for behaviorally disruptive children. He also emphasizes the need to reduce reliance on typical teacher-child verbal exchanges so as to reduce the likelihood of continued negative interactions. A corollary to his advice is the need for an alternative school program to decide whether or not a student will be provided a "parallel" or "modified" curricula. Many school programs attempt to take the generally provided curricula found in general education and modify it to the extent that a student experiences increased success in responding to the material. At a minimum, teacher skill in task analysis, cue presentation, giving specific directions, and broadening the range of accurate responses are necessary to modified curricula approaches. However, we continue to observe poor or unsuccessful responses to modified curricula materials from too many students. One possible reason for less-than-anticipated student response is the material itself. A new instructional structure used with what appears to the student as the "same old stuff" may not include a powerful enough set of variables to overcome what has often become an open aversion by the student to curricula material that has too many cues occasioning unsuccessful, inaccurate responses.

In contrast, a parallel curricula is a sequenced, often hierarchically arranged, set of learning skills that is aside from the learning expectations of the general education system's curricula, i.e., is a parallel curricula track. The curricula material focuses on skills a learner must have to respond effectively to any curricula, but usually basic academic proficiency is sought in reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics operations. Alternative schools are in a unique position to prepare, adopt, and validate experimental curricula that may significantly affect the learning response rates of individual children. The requirements for teacher expertise and curricula management are tremendous (and too exhaustive to discuss here), but the

novelty and latticed learning structure within the material itself can influence successful learning rates, a major source of positive reinforcement to students who so often have not experienced curricula-referenced success in the past.

To the extent that an alternative school program can determine the relative value of a parallel, modified or, pragmatically, a blended curricula strategy, a major source of effectiveness can be tapped. Finally, many students within an alternative school program are not going to remain there for their school careers. Goals of "mainstreaming" are established, and students often move from school to school for reasons other than successful completion of a program. As Blackburn (1977) indicates, any alternative program, especially one heavily using a parallel curricula, must attend not only to the success within a program but also to the expectations of the mainstream program. Cognitive and academic response skills generalizable to multiple educational environments are imperative to a child's success.

Social and Behavioral Development

Since a primary purpose for the placement of behaviorally disordered children into alternative school environments is to enhance socialization in a positive manner (no matter what the avowed philosophy or goals of the alternative school), then issues of how to affect socialization processes must be carefully considered. The alternative school can be a source of functional social and behavioral success instead of a social control mechanism for students. Too often these students have been unsuccessful in more traditional programs, especially those that tend to treat all students equally, that teach in a lock-step curricula, and that establish an environment of uniform behavioral expectations.

A plethora of written statements on intervention practices for effecting behavioral and interpersonal interactions, intrapersonal perceptions, and appropriate social roles are available. A major issue at hand for an alternative school is to consider what philosophical-ideational bent to follow and what overall program strategies are to be derived from that context. In special education the choices often seem to be a behaviorist, psychoeducational, or eclectic framework. However, the lack of theoretical purity and daily pragmatic concerns, as noted above, often make the program's ideational context hazy and difficult to describe succinctly.

Rather than focus on a series of intervention strategies and their relationship to behavioral or social change, or justify one particular theoretical approach versus another, it is the intent here to present a few salient programming features that contribute significantly to the value and accomplishments of an alternative school environment within an educational service delivery system. First, a student progress system seems to be correlated with encouraging pro-social role development. Many writers (e.g., Braaten, 1979; Julian & Weitzner, 1982; McCauley & Erikson, 1982) have described student progress systems in which behavioral change expectations, school consequence or reinforcement features, increased student choice and privilege, and enhanced student responsibility are wedded in comprehensive program approaches to guiding wholesale social and behavioral developments. These student progress systems are typically described as student level systems and/or behavioral code systems in which a student moves from one identifiable phase of behavioral intervention to another. In a level system, students usually begin in a classroom or educational group that is more restrictive than higher level groupings. As the youngster makes progress - i.e., responds to the interventions being applied at any one level - then he/she moves to the next level classroom

or educational grouping, until the highest level is achieved.

As an example, Julian and Weitzner's (1982) description of their student progress system explains how children move from a behavioristically derived teaching style and classroom environment to an interpersonally, more naturally consequential teaching style and environment to a more reflective, choice oriented teaching style and environment (see Figure 2). These program directors recognize that on any given day a series of behavior management strategies will be used, but that the overall climate of the environment is guided by styles such as they describe.

Figure 2

Example of a Student Progress System

TABLE 2 Levels System			
	Objectives	Teacher Style	Student's Developmental Behavioral Level
Level I	Extinction of disruptive behavior; establishment of basic inner controls.	Direct, dominant, authoritarian- implements behavior modification techniques.	Little or no control over behavior; frequent acting-out episodes; some bizarre behaviors.
Level II	Increased inner controls; maintenance of desirable behaviors; beginning development of interpersonal skills.	Blend of direct and indirect, democratic and authoritarian- uses reality therapy techniques and behavior modification techniques as appropriate.	Inner controls established, but need reinforcement; needs to maintain age-appropriate behavior and learn social and academic skills.
Level III	Preparation of student to return to community; firmly established inner controls.	Indirect, relective, democratic- implements reality techniques, aids and reinforces decision-making by the student.	Inner controls well established; needs to develop self-confidence and increase interpersonal and academic skills.

(from Julian & Weitzner, 1982, p. 38)

Essential to the progress system of any educational program is the continuous assessment of progress. Braaten's (1979) description of daily observations and ratings and periodic summaries and reviews is a basic assessment strategy to which programs using level systems for determining progress can adhere. Particular to this type of assessment is the breaking down of desired student social responses and interactions into a series of specific behaviors to be observed. By noting the rate at which students exhibit these behaviors, more precise program planning will occur and intervention strategies will be used. Student progress is related to a substantial data base rather than preconceived adult judgments. In turn, decisions about the movement of students between educational environments (alternative or not, within a program) are derived from the matching of student responses and behavior to the functional characteristics (reinforcement arrangements, teaching styles, curricula demands, etc.) of those educational environments.

Aversive and Deprivation Based Interventions

Alternative school programs for behaviorally disordered children are often expected to cope with youngsters who exhibit seriously disruptive, occasionally violent behaviors. Many programs attempt to decrease these problem behaviors by using procedures that are aversive or deprivational in nature. Most commonly, the deprivational technique of time-out procedures is used, but other strategies such as in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension for a day or longer, or the presentation of aversive consequences are used, e.g., physical restraint. Problems abound in the use (and, too often, misuse) of these strategies, and alternative school programs should expect challenges to their use from consumer, professional, and even legal groups. They are controversial procedures, at best. Programs using such procedures may be well-intended, yet violate a child's rights to appropriate

educational programming, the use of less restrictive interventions, and legal or human rights. The misuse of these procedures is unacceptable, and cannot be considered a reasonable or humane alternative to exclusion, disciplinary suspension, or other forms of punishment.

If aversive or deprivational procedures are planned and used, there must be a reasonable expectation that these strategies will assist in meeting the goals that are a part of the behavioral goals (IEP goals) for the child. It is important to set an operational guideline that such strategies will be used only after documentation that positive, less interfering procedures for modifying behavior have been attempted and failed. There may be times when a child's behavior is so suddenly dangerous or disruptive that it temporarily requires aversive or deprivational intervention. However, once such behaviors are recognized to be an ongoing part of the child's behavioral repertoire, then careful planning and adherence to established intervention guidelines must occur.

Recommended intervention guidelines and planning practices for the use of any aversive or deprivational procedures are as follows:

1. Evidence should be available that positive instructional and intervention strategies are ineffective.
2. Identified behaviors of the child must threaten:
 - 2.1 the child's safety or well-being
 - 2.2 another person's safety or well-being
 - 2.3 physical property
 - 2.4 to significantly interfere in the learning process.
3. Baseline data on one or two behaviors, which are described in observable, measurable terms, is presented to a child study team, or team responsible for IEP management with the child.
4. A description and analysis of the behaviors and data should be provided the parent, and their involvement sought in planning to use aversive or deprivational procedures.

5. The team, including parent(s), should make recommendations on the specific procedures to be used, possible alternative procedures, and the appropriateness of the procedures for an individual.
6. The strategies to be used must be agreed upon by all persons who will put them into effect, and be for the benefit of the child and not for the convenience of staff.
7. The strategies to be used must be the least restrictive strategy available that may affect the student and must be paired with strategies designed to increase desired, positive behaviors desired by parents and staff.
8. Strategies should be approved by the planning team prior to their implementation.
9. Methods of daily data collection and specification as to who is responsible for data collection and summaries should be agreed upon.
10. A written plan should be prepared that includes the following:
 - 10.1 Revised IEP goals and objectives stating terminal behaviors desired and criterion to determine accomplishment of behavior reduction.
 - 10.2 Precise description of: the strategies to be used; setting in which the procedures are to be used; steps to be followed in carrying out the procedures; and data collection practices.
 - 10.3 Persons responsible for carrying out the procedures.
 - 10.4 Review dates on which the plan will be reviewed, modified, or terminated by team members.
11. All staff (and parents, if they choose) who are responsible for carrying out the procedures should receive training on how to implement the plan.
12. The procedures and plan should be supervised systematically to ensure that they are followed as agreed upon.
13. No significant changes in the procedures or plan should be made without full review by the planning team.
14. The parent providing consent to the plan should be made aware in writing that consent may be withdrawn at any time (verbally or preferably in writing) and that the use of aversive or deprivational interventions will be terminated immediately.

The primary deprivational technique used in self-contained alternative school environments has been the "time-out" strategy. Powell and Powell (1982) have provided an excellent analysis on the use of this technique. Evangelist and McCauley (1980) have described the exactness which a school based time-out strategy needs to follow. Other aversive and deprivational strategies have been described elsewhere in the general literature, and while some evaluation of their effectiveness has occurred, more is required. Essentially, powerful intervention techniques are being used with children. These techniques often constrain and suppress behavior, with ripple effects that may be unanticipated or unknown. Even when alternative school staff are wise, careful, and open to continuous re-evaluation of these strategies, their use must be severely restricted.

Mainstreaming

No discussion of alternative school programs for behavior disordered children would be complete without a consideration of children's return to the general education "mainstream". Furthermore, no discussion of mainstreaming can be complete in and of itself - it is a concept and process that has generated much friction and controversy within special education.

Apter (1982) defines mainstreaming as " . . . the conscientious effort to educate handicapped children in the least restrictive setting which is appropriate to their learning needs" (p. 184). In his excellent discussion, Apter (1982) points to the need for an ecological perspective on mainstreaming (and handicapped children), the need to maintain handicapped students in as normal an educational environment as possible, and guidelines for enhancing successful education in the mainstream. A segregated, self-contained alternative school for behavior disordered students needs to attend as faithfully to mainstreaming as does any special program more directly linked to the

general education system. Any alternative program that is not fully self-contained must do the same. Fallacious assumptions have been made about the readiness of general school environments to accommodate the return of handicapped students and about the idea that once a student has made substantial progress in an alternative educational environment that student will be ready for the general educational environment. These assumptions have been the undoing of many students in too many instances. Clearly, the alternative school program must plan for transfer of behavioral progress from one environment to another, develop a data base that establishes when a student is ready (or nearly so) to change to a less restrictive, more appropriate educational environment, and have a transition procedure in place that facilitates a child's return to general mainstream programs.

For a special educational alternative school, the planning for return to the mainstream should begin when a referral is submitted. That is, an overall goal is the return of the child to a mainstream (or less restrictive) environment as soon as educationally feasible. Planning can begin by seeking the inclusion of material in a referral process that reflects:

1. efforts by the general education system to modify curriculum and instructional process so as to match environments to the needs of a referred youngster;
2. specific behavioral expectations for a referred youngster that, when met, would lead to movement back toward a mainstream environment;
3. precise descriptions of a child's needs and the potential match with the provisions of an alternative school environment; and
4. the continuation of efforts by parents, educators, and others to maintain a child's integration into the community through involvement in activities, events, youth groups or clubs, and so on.

As this planning occurs during a referral phase, everyone's eyes are kept on a major goal - the maintenance of the child in a mainstream educational

program or the return of a child to that type of program. Furthermore, it is possible to deflect inappropriate referrals to self-contained alternative schools by keeping these key considerations in the forefront of an individualized planning process.

70 A "return to mainstream" planning process continues after a child has entered an alternative school program. A referral process presented earlier in this chapter stressed the use of an assessment phase. Again, relying on Apter (1982), he notes that an ecological perspective can be taken on assessment of student needs and performance levels. While an assessment phase studies the individual child thoroughly, it is probably of equal importance to study the responsibility of the various environments in which the child resides and learns and the discordance between the child and those environments. The major problem in assessment is to determine the match necessary between a child's needs and an educational environment. However, as Apter states, "The ecological perspective points out the importance of studying and focusing change efforts on other elements of the systems defined by each child - the classrooms, the schools, the teachers, the families, etc." (p. 188). For an alternative school, it is important to conduct an assessment phase so that the general education program can be kept informed of the child's needs, can evaluate their educational programming to determine how they will be able to more effectively educate the child upon his/her return, and to maintain a responsible partnership between their programs and the alternative school's in order to continue to participate in the education of a given child wherever possible.

The importance of a student progress system to an alternative school program has been discussed above. Once a behavior disordered child has been placed in an alternative school, he/she enters this student progress system. As periodic reviews of progress are conducted, an overall question is always

present: Is the student ready for a transition program that will eventually return him/her to a mainstream educational environment? If the data base indicates that a student has made the kind of progress allowing for movement toward a less restrictive, perhaps mainstream educational program, then transition planning needs to occur.

A step-by-step description of a transition process would be too cumbersome to outline here. What is significant to note about transitioning students to other educational programs is the requirement for a carefully spelled out partnership between alternative special education programs and the mainstream program to which a child is headed. Team decisions need to be made as to when and how transition will occur. Experience has determined that it is critical to the child's success in transitioning to other environments that his/her parents, the mainstream school's principal or designated administrator, special education or special service support personnel in both the mainstream and alternative school programs, and the child's current classroom teacher(s) be substantially involved in the decision-making related to the transition process.

Evaluation

The efficacy of alternative school programs for behavior disordered children and youth is always a knotty problem. As Sabatino (1982) points out, "... alternative programs are generated by social conditions, the economic climate, the mood of the nation as reflected in its legislation and funding pattern, and finally by the educational communities' acceptance of change" (p. 9). Furthermore, given the variability in purpose, goals, and practices of alternative school programs, it is difficult to determine what is being evaluated and what cross-program generalizations can be made once evaluation has occurred. Many dilemmas face the alternative school program:

What will be evaluated? How does a school evaluate each program component independently? How can a school validate variables outside the school environment that impact the educational program? How does a school contrast and evaluate the differences between student individual goals and school programmatic goals? Which operational concepts need critical examination among the number of special educational concepts implemented (partially or wholly) within an alternative school program? To what extent will follow-up data on graduated students be used to reflect on program accomplishments? A host of similar questions can be generated to illustrate the complex issues connected to alternative school and special education program evaluation.

Evaluation should be conducted, however. It is important to start somewhere and develop evaluation programs that assist program staff in formulating objectives, revising or modifying program components, critiquing curricula and instructional practices, and establishing a feedback mechanism to all persons involved with an alternative school: students, parents, staff, other educators, and so on. Sindelar and Deno (1978), while discussing the effectiveness of resource programming, comment upon serious methodological and conceptual problems enmeshed in efficacy research that are pertinent to alternative school evaluation. Filipczak (1977) has provided a helpful commentary on the types of data that can be used for evaluation. In essence, these authors' overriding message is that evaluation research must be conducted in relationship to specified program goals, must be as systematic and carefully planned as possible, must be fair and extensive, and be oriented toward upgrading the school program. Evaluation should not be a matter of choice as to whether or not it is conducted; rather the choices should be related to how evaluation is conducted. As Filipczak (1977) said, "... the outcomes of [a] program, in all of their forms, for whatever their honest effect,

demand exposition in the appropriate medium. A program of no proven value that receives high visibility is no worse than a program of high merit that is unknown" (p. 116).

Alternative Education

Alternative educational programs are not intended to replace the general educational program offerings. They are but a point in a continuum or matrix of educational alternatives available to particular children at particular times in their learning. Alternative school programs for special education populations, especially behaviorally disordered youngsters, are designed to be highly specialized programs for a low-incidence, select group of children who need an educational environment not now available in the general education system. Alternative schools are in a unique position to utilize concepts and strategies that create those necessary and appropriate learning environments, and to enhance the educational opportunities of their students. To the extent that an alternative program does these things, it will provide viable alternatives for behaviorally disordered children and youth who might otherwise have been excluded.

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